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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: ARCHBISHOP DEPLORES SYRIAN INTERFERENCE
IN LEBANESE POLITICS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
) .

SYRIAN SCHEMING IMPLEMENTED BY AOUN, MURR

¶1. (C) In a July 26 meeting with the Ambassador and PolOff, Bishop Elias Audi, Metropolitan for the Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut, asserted that Syria wanted to reestablish its presence in Lebanon, or barring that, control the country through proxies. According to Audi, the discord among Christian politicians caused by Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Aoun's challenge to Amine Gemayel's candidacy in the Metn by-election clearly indicated that Aoun and his cohort MP Michel Murr were acting on Syrian orders.

¶2. (C) Audi was convinced that Murr and Tashnaq (Armenian party) had been sincere in their support of Gemayel; their change of tack was evidence of Syrian meddling. While Murr has always been pro-Syrian, Aoun's overwhelming desire to become president had blinded him to the true interests of Lebanon and made him easy prey to Syrian influence. On the other hand, Audi did not think Syria had a clear plan for regaining control of Lebanon, but rather was trying to cripple state institutions, thus creating an unliveable situation for the Lebanese. Eventually, national paralysis would induce them to welcome back the Syrians.

SYRIA AND HIZBALLAH EXPLOIT AOUN'S AMBITION

¶3. (C) Audi noted that, paradoxically, Syria is pushing Aoun to run for president, but that it is intent on preventing the presidential election, if they cannot have the man they want.

And while Aoun was publicly anti-Syrian during his exile in Paris, he changed when he returned to Lebanon. Furthermore, Aoun himself was exploiting the fear of the (Sunni) islamization of Lebanon. Thus, he had allied himself with minority Hizballah. According to Audi, Hizballah was using Aoun, the evidence being that Hizballah parliamentary bloc leader Mohamed Ra'd reportedly told Maronite Patriarch Sfeir that Hizballah does not really support Aoun. Audi concluded that Aoun, by dividing the Christians, is marginalizing them, while Sunnis and Shi'a will manage to co-exist.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) A genial and thoughtful interlocutor, Metropolitan Audi has never before revealed to us the extent of his dislike of Michel Aoun. Previously, he would use only coded

words and body language to raise doubts about the direction Aoun was headed. This time, perhaps as a reflection of more desperate times, he was blunt. We also have never heard him before link Michel Murr so unambiguously to Syria. But in criticizing Lebanon's most prominent Greek Orthodox politician (and the one who holds the key to the Metn parliamentary by-elections -- see septel), Audi exempted Murr's son, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr. Elias, unlike his father, has charted a more Lebanese course and has done a good job in the cabinet, Audi pronounced.

FELTMAN